



Loneliness among older people isn't just for Christmas

The Silver Line calls on organisations in elderly care sector to work together to tackle 'growing epidemic' of loneliness and isolation among the over 65's

25th November, 2015, London: It's that time of year when the perennial issue of loneliness among the older people hits the national headlines – be it the John Lewis Christmas ad, or the story of the 95-year old couple that dialed 999 out of desperation. Indeed, it is estimated that around half a million pensioners spend Christmas Day by themselves every year (1).

But loneliness and isolation among older people is not confined to Christmas – it can actually be the one time of year when well-meaning friends and family do get in touch with their elderly relatives, which can exacerbate their plight.

Across the UK, over 3.5 million over 65's live alone (2); and 1 million older people go a month or more without seeing or speaking to a friend, family member or neighbour (3).

So what can be done to combat loneliness and isolation among older people - which destroys the mental and physical health of our most vulnerable citizens? Today The Silver Line is holding a national conference entitled "Loneliness: Tackling it Together". Attended by over 300 organisations involved in care for the older people - including the likes of Age UK, Alzheimer's Society, Age Scotland, Independent Age, Royal Voluntary Service (RVS), through to the Department of Health - the delegates will explore and agree on how they can work together to offer effective, joined up solutions to address this growing epidemic.

Topics under discussion will include addressing the causes of loneliness as well as the prejudice and discrimination faced by older people in healthcare, employment, housing and the media.

Launching the conference, Dame Esther Rantzen DBE, Founder of The Silver Line said:

"Like many of our Silver Line callers, I know only too well what loneliness feels like. And I know that Christmas is especially difficult if you are on your own. When my late husband Desmond Wilcox died, I tried to make our family Christmas as joyous as it had always been, but it was impossible. In the words of one of our callers, it became 'just another day I had to get through'.

It may not be possible to heal the cause of our loneliness - I know that nothing will bring my husband back and many Silver Line callers have also lost a partner, or a family, or can no longer get out and about. But we can tackle its effects: if we work together we can help restore to older people the confidence, the fun, the respect they deserve. Let's make this Christmas happier. And let's make this the start of a much happier new year."



Sophie Andrews, CEO of The Silver Line said:

"In the two years since launch, our 24/7 year-round helpline has received almost 700,000 calls, and this number is growing exponentially. Last year our phone-line handled more than twice the number of calls over the days around Christmas than they do on the average day; and based on current projections it is anticipated we will be handling twice that again this year.

As Anglia Ruskin University's research, which will be presented later today, shows, callers to The Silver Line are among the hardest to reach older people – those that cannot easily access other services because for example they are confined to their homes through physical or mental disability; for them, the phone can be a lifeline. But we also know there are thousands, even millions more that we haven't reached.

We have called our Conference "Loneliness, Tackling it Together" because this most pernicious of problems has no easy solutions – it needs the efforts of all of us in collaboration to provide for our older people the quality of life they deserve and have the right to demand."

Chief Executive of Independent Age Janet Morrison who will be participating in an interactive panel discussion on effective cross-sector collaboration said:

"This conference couldn't come at a more important time - the public's awareness of the devastating effects of loneliness amongst older people has never been higher but as a society we need to find new solutions to ensure their continuing contribution to our communities. This will require actions as individuals, families, neighbours, communities, service providers and commissioners."

Fellow panellist Jeremy Hughes, CEO of Alzheimer's Society said: "One third of people with dementia live alone at home. All too easily they are frightened and cut off from the community. The Silver Line Conference reminds how we must all pull together to better support some of the most vulnerable people in our communities".

This was echoed by David McCullough, Chief Executive of RVS:

"We are really looking forward to being part of an event where all of us who want to enrich the lives of older people can work together, share what we know and make the sum of our work greater than the parts."

Age UK's Director of Services, Pam Creaven added:

"It's very sad to think that more than a million older people say they go for over a month without speaking to a friend, neighbour or family member. Contrary to what many people think, loneliness is not a normal part of ageing. It not only makes life miserable, it can have a serious impact on people's



physical and mental health too. Because of this we are pleased to be working with The Silver Line to tackle this important public health issue and improve the lives of older people."

The conference also coincides with the second birthday of The Silver Line Helpline, founded by Dame Esther Rantzen to help combat isolation and loneliness in older people. The free, confidential helpline is open 24/7, 365 days a year providing information, friendship and advice every hour of every day and signposting callers to other resources in their community; this means that the hardest to reach in the older population are put in touch with those who can and will help them.

-ENDS -

Note to Editors

- Please always include The Silver Line Helpline: 0800 4 70 80 90 FREE
- Website:www.thesilverline.org.uk

About The Silver Line

- The Silver Line is the UK's only free, confidential, 24-hour seven-days-a-week, helpline for older people.
- Since being set up in 2013, The Silver Line has received over 650,000 calls from lonely older people.
- 68% of calls are after 6pm or at weekends; while 67% of callers contact the helpline because they are lonely or isolated, 88% live alone, and 54% say they have no one else to speak to.
- The Silver Line have more than 2,000 volunteers.
- The Silver Line works in partnership with Age Scotland to deliver the service in Scotland.

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For further information on:

Independent Age, please visit: <http://www.independentage.org/>

Alzheimer's Society, please visit: <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/>

Royal Voluntary Service, please visit: <http://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/>

Age UK, please visit: <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/>

Sources:

(1) Various, e.g.: Friends of the Elderly (2011), Age UK (2013), RVS (2014)

(2) ONS Statistical Bulletin: Families and Households, 2015 (05.11.15);

(3) Age UK, 2015